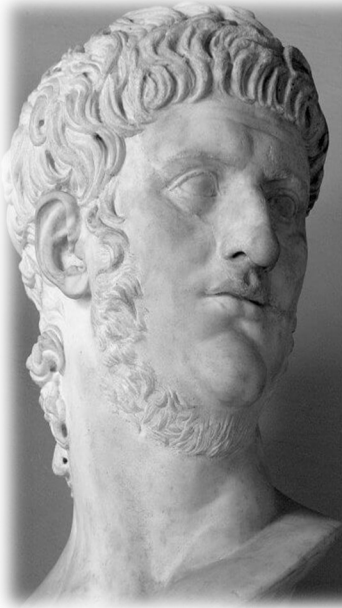


Greatest Of All Times

108

G
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PERSONALITIES



"I have done everything
that I should, but the
outcome is in the
hand of fortune"

Nero - www.quoteikon.com



15 Dec 37 <::><::><::> 9 Jun 68

Compiled by:
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<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero>

Nero



Head of Nero from an oversized statue. [Glyptothek](#), [Munich](#)

Roman emperor

Reign 13 October 54 – 9 June 68

Predecessor [Claudius](#)

Successor [Galba](#)

Born Lucius [Domitius](#) Ahenobarbus
15 December AD 37
[Antium](#), [Italy](#), Roman Empire

Died 9 June AD 68 (aged 30)
outside Rome, Italy

Burial Mausoleum of the Domitii
Ahenobarbi, [Pincian Hill](#), Rome

Spouses

- [Claudia Octavia](#)
- [Poppaea Sabina](#)

- [Statilia Messalina](#)
- [Sporus](#)
- [Pythagoras](#)

Issue [Claudia Augusta](#)

Names

Nero Claudius Caesar Drusus Germanicus

Regnal name

Nero Claudius Caesar [Augustus](#) Germanicus

Dynasty [Julio-Claudian](#)

Father • [Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus](#)
 • [Claudius](#) (adoptive)

Mother [Agrippina the Younger](#)



Julio-Claudian dynasty

Chronology

[Augustus](#)

27 BC – AD 14

[Tiberius](#)

AD 14–37

[Caligula](#)

AD 37–41

[Claudius](#)

AD 41–54

Nero

AD 54–68

Preceded by *Followed by*
[Roman Republic](#) [Year of the Four Emperors](#)

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Statue of Nero in his birthplace of [Anzio, Italy](#)

Nero and History: A Clash of Interest

<https://projects.swan.ac.uk/ancient-world/?p=642>

*By Oscar Brierley, 2nd Year Classical Civilisation Student
Student Interest Research*



I was first introduced to the intricacies of Nero's reign of AD54-68 in Dr Nigel Pollard and Dr Joanne Berry's *Rome: From Village to Empire* module. While I had heard of him before, the interpretation that I had of him was merely superficial, devoid of any historical methodology. What I learned about him in these lectures, however, challenged this view in the most fascinating way: it brought to light the facts of Nero's reign, with no bias, creating a completely different character from what had been formed in my mind. This is the basis of my fascination with Nero, and, to an extent, my love of history. The fact that there are so many interpretations of Nero, so often exaggerated to draw in an audience, simply reflects that very little has changed since his reign. Some of Suetonius' more extravagant accounts continue to be repeated today, and filtering through these accounts to find the truth never ceases to entertain me.

The idea that "Nero fiddled while Rome burned" has long been rejected by historians. However, the notion that Nero was a debased, merciless emperor to the extent that he would not look out of place in a horror story still remains laced within history. The name Nero has become so synonymous with brutality that if you were to call someone "Neronian" you would most probably follow by offering them a therapist appointment. Most people, when Nero is mentioned, would call back to Joaquin Phoenix's Commodus in *Gladiator*, and think that he is a close enough representation. If Suetonius' *Twelve Caesars*, and a number of other

works on Nero's life are taken as fact, this perception would not be far from the truth.



The Remorse of Nero, J. W. Waterhouse. 1878. A depiction of Nero lamenting after the assassination of his mother Agrippina in AD59, notoriously by his own command.

Only recently have we been able to read Roman history with a level of modern academic scrutiny. Before the nineteenth century, sources such as the works of Suetonius and Livy could mostly be accepted as fact, with little notion of the possibility of a personal, ideological narrative within their works. Recently however, there has been an increase of historians looking at history in the context the society in which they were written, and not their own. And yet still there remains a struggle to separate fact from fiction when it comes to modern accounts of Roman Emperors, most prominently those of the imperial era. Else Roesdahl perfectly describes ancient works driven by a personal narrative as "historical novels", yet documentaries and books continue to disperse them as fact. Nowhere else is this as apparent as in depictions of Nero, which continue to be as sensationalist today as they were almost 2000 years ago.

Nero came at a time when the Roman senate was still adapting itself to a state ruled by a single emperor. The senate and Roman elite began to realise their need to secure influence which was rapidly dissolving under Emperors who noticed the senate was now merely an advisory institution. The pragmatic members of the elite, however, realised that there was still a way to exercise power over the Emperors: through writing. Roman elites had already been writing diaries and cataloguing letters for centuries, but not as extensively as during this time of slow senatorial alienation from imperial power. With loss of power came the rise of writing Roman "history". Authors began to write with more than the glorification of the Roman empire in mind.

Suetonius' account of the lives of emperors is wonderfully useful when attempting to discover the ins and outs of Roman society and its elites, but becomes frustrating in its description of details, some of which Suetonius could not possibly have known. He cites "reliable authorities" as his sources, which

dissolves any form of reliability his statements have. A particularly far-fetched moment in his description of Nero comes after the assassination of his mother Agrippina by his own order. It states that Nero rushed to his mother's corpse to examine and assess her body critically, perversely. This certainly does evoke a reaction of disgust in the reader, but this is exactly the reaction Suetonius desires. If he wanted to give his readers a chance to critically evaluate Nero, he would have omitted this moment entirely. Nero's chapter in Suetonius' *The Twelve Caesars* is rife with moments like this, but sensationalist stories attempting to dramatise Nero's life for an audience reaction do not end with Suetonius' work. You simply have to watch a modern documentary on his life to find that ridiculous examples of imagery still remain. Documentaries begin with wonderful montages of brutality and fire overlaid with the sounds of screaming crowds and a deafening orchestra in the process of a violent fit. While it certainly is attractive to an audience, you could start a documentary on any Roman emperor with a montage of brutalities and remain safe in the assurance that it remains loyal to its source material. Nero's violence was not unique, simply more public and personal.

Those who did not write history, the common people of Rome, it is harder to predict the opinions of. However, we can probably assume that Nero's reign, being of such spectacle, was in fact enjoyed by the lower classes of Rome. His love of all the arts and past times of Rome, from poetry to music to athletics, ingratiated him with the Roman people, something an Emperor completely enthralled with the Senate would find nearly impossible. He thrived in this section of Roman society, something which has been difficult to determine due to the colouring of history by the elite. Nero's obsession with Hellenic, artistic culture benefitted both him and the eastern half of the empire when he brought into effect a "liberation of the Hellas", exempting Achaia and the Peloponnese from taxes. Upon his return, Nero acquired all manner of divine acclamations, "Nero Zeus the Liberator", to name one among many others. On one side of this decision is a certain distaste from the Senate due to its removal of a large portion of income to Rome. On the other, however, was a huge increase in support for Nero from the lower classes, marvelling at his generosity.

And yet it cannot be denied that Nero was a man of few boundaries when it came to indulging a more extreme lifestyle. And it is in these indulgences that he simply happened to be on the wrong side of the authors of history. His obsession with art leaked into his political life, spawning a number of Hellenistic values being put upon the Senate and people of Rome. The most prominent example of this is the quinquennial *Neroneia* he introduced to Rome in AD60: a series of artistic competitions, modelling on Homeric contests. This slow merging of Hellenistic and Roman values in the public domain was unsurprisingly disturbing for the traditionalist Senate. While leaking into some parts of his political attitude, his love of art simply replaced and removed other aspects of politics. His apparent lack of reaction initially to Vindex's revolt in AD68-69 shows his mental separation from some aspects of policy, and a reliance upon others – in this case probably Verginius Rufus, a nearby commander of an army – to solve the issues which he held no concern for.

So why do people love to dramatise his life so often? Part of the problem when looking at Nero's life comes from the imaginations it seems to have captured. Recently, in Trier, there was an art exhibition using the theme of Nero's death named *Lust and Crime*, a rather theatrical name intended to pull in those with less interest. In the same way that Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* twisted the love between its two protagonists to romanticise their situation, this art installation reveals representations of Nero's life that have twisted him into a figure of mythical debauchery.

The fact of the matter remains, however, that we will never truly know Nero. We can only get two extreme accounts of him—one supportive, and one, more substantial, damning him. Though recently it has been accepted that the truth about Nero's reign remains hidden somewhere between those two accounts, it is impossible to pinpoint exactly where. Modern romanticising of his reign has not helped this, and many documentaries and books on his reign merely act to obscure the balance between the two opinions. Nero has inspired so much artistic interest in his modern audience that his supposed final words, "what an artist dies in me", take on a completely different meaning. Though an artist died with Nero, his death generated more works of art and imagination than he could possibly have wished for, transforming his rule into one of mythical proportions.



The Approaching End of Nero

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nero-Roman-emperor/The-approaching-end>

Meanwhile, the imperial government had had some success in the east. The great foreign-policy problem of the time was that of [Armenia](#). Since the reign of [Augustus](#), it had been Roman policy to appoint [vassal](#) kings there and so make Armenia a buffer state against [Parthia](#), [Rome's implacable](#) foe in the east. But the Armenians had long chafed under Roman rule, and in the [emperor](#) Claudius's last years a Parthian prince named [Tiridates](#) had made himself king of Armenia with the support of its people. In response, Nero's new government took vigorous action, appointing an able general, [Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo](#), to the command. Prolonged military operations by Corbulo led in 66 to a new settlement; Tiridates was recognized as king, but he was compelled to come to Rome to receive his crown from Nero.

Despite this success, the provinces were increasingly uneasy, for they were oppressed by exactions to cover Nero's extravagant expenditures on his court, new buildings, and gifts to his favourites; the last expenditures alone are said to have amounted to more than two billion sesterces, a sum that was several times the annual cost of the army. A revolt in Britain was

headed by Queen [Boudicca](#) (Boadicea) in 60 or 61, and an insurrection in Judaea lasted from 66 to 70. Nero had many [antagonists](#) by this time. The great [conspiracy](#) to make [Gaius Calpurnius Piso](#) emperor in 65 reveals the [diversity](#) of his enemies—senators, knights, officers, and philosophers. That the conspiracy included military officers was an ominous sign, but Nero did not give way to panic; slaves kept him out of danger by warning him of plots that were hatching among their masters. And he did not altogether abandon his [lenient](#) attitude. Out of 41 participants in the Piso conspiracy, only 18 died (including [Seneca](#) and the poet [Lucan](#)), either by order or from fear; the others were exiled or pardoned.

At the end of the year 66, Nero undertook a long visit to Greece that was to keep him away from Rome for 15 months, and during his absence he entrusted the consulate to one of his freedmen. On this trip Nero engaged in new displays of his artistic prowess, and he walked about garbed as an [ascetic](#), barefoot and with flowing hair. His enthusiasm for Greek [culture](#) also prompted him to free a number of Greek cities in honour of their glorious past. In the four months following his return to Rome in February 68, his delirious pretensions as both an artist and a religious worshipper aroused the [enmity](#) not only of the Senate and those patricians who had been dispossessed by him but also of the Italian middle class, which had old-fashioned [moral](#) views and which furnished most of the officers of the army. Even the common soldiers of the legions were scandalized to see the descendant of Caesar publicly perform onstage the parts not only of ancient Greek heroes but of far lower characters. "I have seen him onstage," [Gaius Julius Vindex](#), the legate who rebelled against him, was to say, "playing pregnant women and slaves about to be executed."

At the news of revolts brewing throughout the empire—that of the provincial governor Servius Sulpicius [Galba](#) in Spain, the rebellion of the [provincial](#) governor [Gaius Julius Vindex](#) at [Lyon](#) in [Gaul](#) (France), and others on the eastern frontier—Nero only laughed and indulged in further megalomaniacal displays instead of taking action. "I have only to appear and sing to have peace once more in Gaul," he is reported to have said. Meanwhile, the revolt spread and the legions made Galba emperor. The Senate condemned Nero to die a slave's death: on a cross and under the whip. The [Praetorian Guard](#), his palace guard, abandoned him, and his freedmen left to embark on the ships he kept in readiness at [Ostia](#), the port of Rome. Nero was [obliged](#) to flee the city. According to [Suetonius](#), he stabbed himself in the throat with a dagger. According to another version (recounted by [Tacitus](#) and almost certainly fiction), he reached the Greek islands, where the following year (69) the governor of Cythnos (modern Kíthnos) recognized him in the guise of a red-haired prophet and leader of the poor, had him arrested, and executed the sentence that had been passed by the Senate.

The Roman populace and the Praetorian Guard later came to regret that they had lost such a liberal patron, but to his subjects in general Nero had been a tyrant, and the revolts his misrule [provoked](#) sparked a series of civil wars that for a time threatened the survival of the Roman Empire and caused widespread misery.

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Who was Nero?

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/who-was-nero>

Nero is one of Rome's most infamous rulers, notorious for his cruelty, debauchery and eccentricity.

But was he really the tyrant that history has painted him to be? Nero exhibition curator Francesca Bologna goes in search of the real Nero.

Nero was the 5th emperor of Rome and the last of Rome's first dynasty, the Julio-Claudians, founded by Augustus (the adopted son of Julius Caesar). Nero is known as one of Rome's most infamous rulers, notorious for his cruelty and debauchery. He ascended to power in AD 54 aged just 16 and died at 30. He ruled at a time of great social and political change, overseeing momentous events such as the Great Fire of Rome and Boudica's rebellion in Britain. He allegedly killed his mother and two of his wives, only cared about his art and had very little interest in ruling the empire.



Nero after the burning of Rome from *Le Monde Illustré*.
Wood engraving, 1862.

But what do we really know about Nero? Can we separate the scandalous stories told by later authors from the reality of his rule?

Most of what we know about Nero comes from the surviving works of three historians – Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio. All written decades after Nero's death, their accounts have long shaped our understanding of this emperor's rule. However, far from being impartial narrators presenting objective accounts of past events, these authors and their sources wrote with a very clear agenda in mind. Nero's demise brought forward a period of chaos and civil war – one that ended only when a new dynasty seized power, the Flavians. Authors writing under the Flavians all had an interest in legitimising the new ruling family by portraying the last of the Julio-Claudians in the worst possible light, turning history into propaganda. These accounts became the 'historical' sources used by later historians, therefore perpetuating a fabricated image of Nero, which has survived all the way to the present.

Birth and early years



Portrait bust of the younger Agrippina,
the mother of Nero. 37–39 AD.

Nero was born Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus on 15 December AD 37.

He was the son of Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus and Agrippina the Younger. Both Gnaeus and Agrippina were the grandchildren of Augustus, giving Nero Augustus' great, great grandson a strong claim to power.

Nero was only two years old when his mother was exiled and three when his father died. His inheritance was taken from him and he was sent to live with his aunt. However, Nero's fate changed again when Claudius became emperor, restoring the boy's property and recalling his mother Agrippina from exile.

Aged 13 - Adoption



**Marble statue of young Nero, AD 50–54.
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais
(Musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski.**

In AD 49 the emperor Claudius married Agrippina, and adopted Nero the following year. It is at this point that Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus changed his name to Nero Claudius Caesar Drusus Germanicus. In Roman times it was normal to change your name when adopted, abandoning your family name in favour of your adoptive father's. Nero was a common name among members of the Claudian family, especially in Claudius' branch.

Nero and Agrippina offered Claudius a politically useful link back to Augustus, strengthening his position.

Claudius appeared to favour Nero over his natural son, Britannicus, marking Nero as the designated heir.

Aged 16 - Emperor



Marble relief with soldiers of the Praetorian Guard, who served as personal guards to the emperor. Rome, Italy, AD 51–2.

When Claudius died in AD 54, Nero became emperor just two months before turning 17.

As he was supported by both the army and the senate, his rise to power was smooth. His mother Agrippina exerted a significant influence, especially at the beginning of his rule.

Aged 21 - Agrippina's murder

The Roman historians Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio all claim that Nero, fed up with Agrippina's interference, decided to kill her.

Given the lack of eyewitnesses, there is no way of knowing if or how this happened. However, this did not stop historians from fabricating dramatic stories of Agrippina's murder, asserting that Nero tried (and failed) to kill her with a boat engineered to sink, before sending his men to do the job.

Agrippina allegedly told them to stab her in the womb that bore Nero, her last words clearly borrowed from stage plays.



power struggle: gold coin showing Nero and Agrippina, Italy, 54 AD.

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It is entirely possible, as claimed by Nero himself, that Agrippina chose (or was more likely forced) to take her own life after her plot against her son was discovered.

Aged 23 - Boudica's revolt

Early in his rule, Nero had to contend with a rebellion in the newly conquered province of Britain.



Illustration to Bowyer's edition of Hume's *History of England* showing Boudica addressing a crowd of men. Etching and engraving, 1795.

In AD 60–61, Queen Boudica of the Iceni tribe led a revolt against the Romans, attacking and laying waste to important Roman settlements. The possible causes of the rebellion were numerous – the greed of the Romans exploiting the newly conquered territories, the recalling of loans made to local leaders, ongoing conflict in Wales and, above all, violence against the family of Prasutagus, Boudica's husband and king of the Iceni.

Boudica and the rebels destroyed Colchester, London and St Albans before being heavily defeated by Roman troops. After the uprising, the governor of Britain Suetonius Paulinus introduced harsher laws against the Britons,

until Nero replaced him with the more conciliatory governor Publius Petronius Turpilianus.



The recently excavated Fenwick Hoard was buried for safekeeping during Boudica's attack on Colchester. The owners of these objects, a Roman veteran and his wife, never managed to retrieve them. AD 60-61

Aged 24 - Execution of Octavia



**Marble portrait, possibly of Claudia Octavia. Italy, Julio-Claudian.
With permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Museo
Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli.**

The marriage between Nero and Octavia, aged 15 and 13/14 at the time, was arranged by their parents in order to further legitimise Nero's claim to the throne. Octavia was the daughter of the emperor Claudius from a previous marriage, so when Claudius married Agrippina and adopted her son Nero, Nero and Octavia became brother and sister. In order to arrange their marriage, Octavia had to be adopted into another family.

Their marriage was not a happy one. According to ancient writers, Nero had various affairs until his lover Poppaea Sabina convinced him to divorce his wife. Octavia was first exiled then executed in AD 62 on adultery charges. According to ancient writers, her banishment and death caused great unrest among the public, who sympathised with the dutiful Octavia.

No further motives were offered for Octavia's death other than Nero's passion for Poppaea, and we will probably never know what transpired at court. The fact that Octavia couldn't produce an heir while Poppaea was pregnant with Nero's daughter likely played an important role in deciding Octavia's fate.

Aged 26 - Great Fire of Rome



**Peter Ustinov plays Nero in *Quo Vadis*, 1951.
The character of Nero plays the lyre as Rome burns.**

On 19 July AD 64, a fire started close to the Circus Maximus. The flames soon encompassed the entire city of Rome and the fire raged for nine days.

Only four of the 14 districts of the capital were spared, while three were completely destroyed.

Rome had already been razed by flames – and would be again in its long history – but this event was so severe it came to be known as the Great Fire of Rome.

Later historians blamed Nero for the event, claiming that he set the capital ablaze in order to clear land for the construction of a vast new palace. According to Suetonius and Cassius Dio, Nero took in the view of the burning city from the imperial residence while playing the lyre and singing about the fall of Troy. This story, however, is fictional.



Fragment of wall painting from Nero's palace, the Domus Aurea. AD 64–68.

Tacitus, the only historian who was actually alive at the time of the Great Fire of Rome (although only 8 years old), wrote that Nero was not even in Rome when the fire started, but returned to the capital and led the relief efforts.

Aged 27 - Death of Poppaea



Marble portrait, possibly of Nero's wife Poppaea Sabina. Rome, Italy, AD 50–68.

Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio all describe Nero as being blinded by passion for his wife Poppaea, yet they accuse him of killing her, allegedly by kicking her in an outburst of rage while she was pregnant.

Interestingly, pregnant women being kicked to death by enraged husbands is a recurring theme in ancient literature, used to explore the (self) destructive tendencies of autocrats. The Greek writer Herodotus tells the story of how the Persian king Cambyses kicked his pregnant wife in the stomach, causing her death. A similar episode is told of Periander, tyrant of Corinth. Nero is just one of many allegedly 'mad' tyrants for which this literary convention was used.

Poppaea probably died from complications connected with her pregnancy and not at Nero's hands. She was given a lavish funeral and was deified.

Aged 28 - the Golden Day



The gates of the temple of Janus in Rome were symbolically closed during periods of peace and opened in times of war. In AD 66, Nero closed the gates of the temple, marking the end of war with Parthia. This act was celebrated with the issue of a [special coin](#), showing the temple with its doors closed. Minted in France, 66 AD.

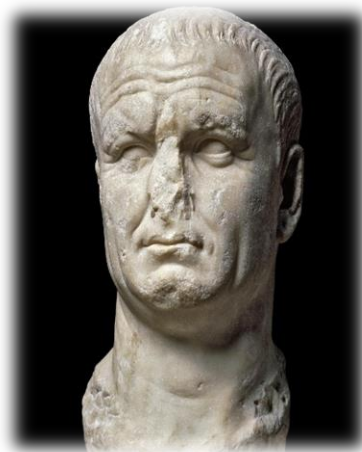
Centred on greater Iran, the Parthian empire was a major political and cultural power and a long-standing enemy of Rome. The two powers had long been contending for control over the buffer state of Armenia and open conflict sparked again during Nero's rule. The Parthian War started in AD 58 and, after initial victories and following set-backs, ended in AD 63 when a diplomatic solution was reached between Nero and the Parthian king Vologases I.

According to this settlement Tiridates, brother of the Parthian king, would rule over Armenia, but only after having travelled all the way to Rome to be crowned by Nero.

The journey lasted 9 months, Tiridates' retinue included 3,000 Parthian horsemen and many Roman soldiers. The coronation ceremony took place in the summer of AD 66 and the day was celebrated with much pomp: all the people of Rome saw the new king of Armenia kneeling in front of Nero. This was the Golden Day of Nero's rule.

Aged 30 - death

In AD 68, Vindex, the governor of Gaul (France), rebelled against Nero and declared his support for Galba, the governor of Spain. Vindex was defeated in battle by troops loyal to Nero, yet Galba started gaining more military support.



Head from an over-life-sized marble statue of the emperor Vespasian, probably re-carved from a portrait of Nero. Roman Imperial, 70–80 AD.

It was at this point that Nero lost the support of Rome's people due to a grain shortage, caused by a rebellious commander who cut the crucial food supply from Egypt to the capital. Abandoned by the people and declared an enemy of the state by the senate, Nero tried to flee Rome and eventually committed suicide.

Following his death, Nero's memory was condemned (a practice called *damnatio memoriae*) and the images of the emperor were destroyed, removed or reworked. However, Nero was still given an expensive funeral and for a long-time people decorated his tomb with flowers, some even believing he was still alive.

After Nero's death, civil war ensued. At the end of the so-called 'Year of the Four Emperors' (AD 69), Vespasian became emperor and started a new dynasty: the Flavians.

Was Nero a tyrant?

Nero was a young ruler trying to negotiate his position within a relatively new and unstable political system, one where monarchical (the emperor) and republican (the senate) elements sat side by side. While the emperor surpassed all in terms of power and authority, the outward appearance of monarchy had to be avoided. Emperors therefore needed to recognise, at least formally, the role of the senate. This traditional council, to which belonged only the members of the aristocracy, had long played an important role in the government of Rome. With the Civil War and the end of the Republic, however, senatorial power was severely weakened.



Copper-alloy head of the emperor Nero,
found in England, AD 54–61.

Nero, like other emperors before and after him, often clashed with the senate, his superior authority at odds with the views of this traditional

aristocratic assembly that was slowly but irrefutably losing power. Nero was depicted as a mad tyrant by ancient historians belonging to the senatorial elite, but we should keep in mind that they were far from impartial. It is not surprising that members of this group, when writing about Nero, were keen on representing him in the worst possible light.

However, when we consider the lower classes, quite a different picture emerges. A number of graffiti found in Rome hail Nero and his name is the most commonly found on the walls of the city, more than any other Julio-Claudian emperor or of the Flavians that came after him.

If we turn to Rome, we see how his actions benefited the people of the capital. Nero built magnificent public baths and, through the construction of a grand covered market and the improvement of the connections between Rome and its harbour, he made sure that his people would have had access to food. Not only did Nero ensure that the people's essential needs were met, he also provided them with entertainment venues such as a now lost wooden amphitheatre. The new building regulations he introduced after the

'Bad' emperors in Roman history

Based on ancient historians' accounts, we would have a hard time deciding who was the worst Roman emperor. Was it Caligula, who allegedly wanted to make his horse a consul and thought of himself as a god? Or the autocratic Domitian, who feared conspiracies against him and executed or exiled many leading citizens of the time? Maybe the cruel Commodus, who fancied himself a new Hercules and fought as a gladiator in the arena? Caracalla is also a good candidate: he had his own brother murdered so he could rule alone and he wiped out all of his opponents.



Miniature bronze bust of Caligula on a globe. AD 37–41.

Nero was only one of many 'bad' emperors to be described as tyrannical, ruthless, and aspiring to be considered as gods. The similarity of these

allegations should not come as a surprise, considering they were all made by dissatisfied senators to slander their political enemies. Even Augustus, epitome of the good emperor as he might be, did not have a spotless reputation. His rise to power was a bloody one, as testified by the proscription list he signed with Mark Antony and Lepidus, with whom he governed Rome at the time.



Etching showing the twelve Caesars. 1770–1830.

How do we judge then? Is senseless cruelty worse than calculated ruthlessness? And how can we tell fact from fiction, since what we know of these emperors comes from sources that are anything but impartial?

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Memorials



[01] Colossus of Nero

The **Colossus of Nero** (***Colossus Neronis***) was a 30-metre (98 ft) [bronze statue](#) that the [Emperor Nero](#) (37–68 AD) created in the [vestibule](#) of his [Domus Aurea](#), the imperial villa complex which spanned a large area from the north side of the [Palatine Hill](#), across the [Velian ridge](#) to the [Esquiline Hill](#) in [Rome](#). It was modified by Nero's successors into a statue of the sun god [Sol](#). The statue was eventually moved to a spot outside the [Flavian Amphitheatre](#), which (according to one of the more popular theories) became known, by its proximity to the Colossus, as the [Colosseum](#).

The last mention of the *Colossus* is in an illuminated manuscript from the late 4th century AD. The statue disappeared sometime afterwards, likely toppled by an earthquake or destroyed during the [Sack of Rome](#), although some sources indicate the statue may have remained standing as late as

the 7th century AD. Today, the only remnants of the statue are some concrete blocks that once made up the foundation of its marble pedestal.



Location of the Colossus (in red near the center) on a map of Rome



[02] Golden House (Palace) of Nero

Golden House of Nero, [palace](#) in [ancient Rome](#) that was constructed by the emperor [Nero](#) between AD 65 and 68, after the great fire of 64 (an occasion the emperor used to expropriate an area of more than 200 acres [81 hectares] of land in the centre of the city). Nero had already planned and begun a palace, the Domus Transitoria, that was to link the existing buildings on the [Palatine Hill](#) with the Gardens of Maecenas and other [imperial](#) properties on the Esquiline and adjoining hills. To these he added a large part of the Caelian and Oppian hills and the valley between them and the Palatine. This whole area was laid out as a park with porticoes, pavilions, baths, and fountains, and in the centre an artificial lake was made; under the emperor [Vespasian](#) the lake was drained to provide a site for the [Colosseum](#). On the slopes of the Velia at the east end of the [Forum](#), a grandiose colonnaded approach and vestibule were constructed, within which stood a colossal gilded bronze statue of Nero.

The domestic wing of the palace stood on the slopes of the Oppian Hill facing south across the lake.

Little has survived of the palace. Because the expropriations involved in its building were deeply [resented](#), Nero's successors hastened to put large parts of the palace to public use or to construct other buildings on the land. Of the sumptuous wall paintings and stucco decorations described by [Pliny](#), all that was visible by the 16th century to inspire the grotesques of [Raphael](#) and his followers were the wall paintings in the *grotte*, or caverns, of the palace. After 15 years of restoration work, part of the palace was opened to the public in 1999; however, heavy rains in 2006 weakened the structure and forced the site to close. It was later temporarily reopened, despite ongoing repair work.

The Golden House is historically important because it expressed the [aesthetic](#) of monumental architecture that was to characterize the imperial style of Roman architecture under [Domitian](#), [Trajan](#), and [Hadrian](#).



Golden House of Nero Statue in the Golden House of Nero, Rome.

[03] Arch of Nero

Arch of Nero (Latin: *Arcus Neronis*) is a now lost [triumphal arch](#) dedicated to the Roman emperor [Nero](#) that was located in [Rome, Italy](#).

The arch was erected in the years between AD 58 and 62 and was designed to commemorate victories won by [Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo](#) in Parthia ([Tacitus Annales](#) 13.41; 15.18). Located on the slope of the [Capitoline](#)

[Hill](#) in a locality referred to as *inter duos lucos*, the arch is known from coin representations, in which it appears as an arch with a single bay surmounted by a [quadriga](#).



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Nero is remembered as one of the most tyrannical emperors of Rome, but evidence suggests he was popular among the people for many years.



A statue of Agrippina the Younger and her young son Nero.



The furies present the dead body of Agrippina to her son Nero after he ordered for her to be killed.



Claudia Octavia was the daughter of the former emperor, Claudius, and was very popular with the people.



Nero is depicted enjoying some music while Rome burns, but he was not actually in Rome when the fire started.



Boudica's rebellion in Britain was just one of the uprisings that Nero had to face during his reign.



Abandoned by his allies and with a new emperor being declared, Nero took his own life.

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Historiography

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero#Historiography>

The history of Nero's reign is problematic in that no historical sources survived that were contemporary with Nero. These first histories, while they still existed, were described as biased and fantastical, either overly critical or praising of Nero. The original sources were also said to contradict on a number of events. Nonetheless, these lost primary sources were the basis of surviving secondary and tertiary histories on Nero written by the next generations of historians. A few of the contemporary historians are known by name. [Fabius Rusticus](#), [Cluvius Rufus](#) and [Pliny the Elder](#) all wrote condemning histories on Nero that are now lost. There were also pro-Nero histories, but it is unknown who wrote them or for what deeds Nero was praised.

The bulk of what is known of Nero comes from [Tacitus](#), [Suetonius](#), and [Cassius Dio](#), who were all of the upper classes. Tacitus and Suetonius wrote their histories on Nero over 50 years after his death, while Cassius Dio wrote his history over 150 years after Nero's death. These sources contradict one another on a number of events in Nero's life, including the death of [Claudius](#), the death of [Agrippina](#), and the Roman fire of AD 64, but they are consistent in their condemnation of Nero.

Cassius Dio

[Cassius Dio](#) (c. 155–229) was the son of [Cassius Apronianus](#), a Roman senator. He passed the greater part of his life in public service. He was a senator under [Commodus](#) and governor of Smyrna after the death of [Septimius Severus](#); and afterwards suffect consul around 205, and also proconsul in Africa and Pannonia.

Books 61–63 of Dio's *Roman History* describe the reign of Nero. Only fragments of these books remain and what does remain was abridged and altered by [John Xiphilinus](#), an 11th-century monk.

Dio Chrysostom

[Dio Chrysostom](#) (c. 40–120), a Greek philosopher and historian, wrote the Roman people were very happy with Nero and would have allowed him to rule indefinitely. They longed for his rule once he was gone and embraced imposters when they appeared:

Indeed the truth about this has not come out even yet; for so far as the rest of his subjects were concerned, there was nothing to prevent his continuing to be Emperor for all time, seeing that even now everybody wishes he were still alive. And the great majority do believe that he still is, although in a certain sense he has died not once but often along with those who had been firmly convinced that he was still alive.

Epictetus

[Epictetus](#) (c. 55–135) was the slave to Nero's scribe Epaphroditos. He makes a few passing negative comments on Nero's character in his work, but makes no remarks on the nature of his rule. He describes Nero as a spoiled, angry and unhappy man.

Josephus

The historian [Josephus](#) (c. 37–100), while calling Nero a tyrant, was also the first to mention bias against Nero. Of other historians, he said:



A circa 18th-century woodcut of the historian [Josephus](#) (c. 37–100), who accused other historians of slandering Nero.

"But I omit any further discourse about these affairs; for there have been a great many who have composed the history of Nero; some of which have departed from the truth of facts out of favour, as having received benefits from him; while others, out of hatred to him, and the great ill-will which they bore him, have so impudently raved against him with their lies, that they justly deserve to be condemned. Nor do I wonder at such as have told lies of Nero, since they have not in their writings preserved the truth of history as to those facts that were earlier than his time, even when the actors could have no way incurred their hatred, since those writers lived a long time after them."

Lucan

Although more of a poet than a historian, [Lucanus](#) (c. 39–65) has one of the kindest accounts of Nero's rule. He writes of peace and prosperity under Nero, in contrast to previous war and strife. Ironically, he was later involved in a conspiracy to overthrow Nero and was executed.^[147]

Philostratus

[Philostratus](#) II, "the Athenian" (c. 172–250), spoke of Nero in the [Life of Apollonius of Tyana](#) (Books 4–5). Although he has a generally bad or dim view of Nero, he speaks of others' positive reception of Nero in the East.

Pliny the Elder

The history of Nero by [Pliny the Elder](#) (c. 24–79) did not survive. Still, there are several references to Nero in Pliny's *Natural Histories*. Pliny has one of the worst opinions of Nero and calls him an "enemy of mankind".

Plutarch

[Plutarch](#) (c. 46–127) mentions Nero indirectly in his account of the Life of Galba and the Life of Otho, as well as in the Vision of Thespesius in Book 7 of the *Moralia*, where a voice orders that Nero's soul be transferred to a

more offensive species. Nero is portrayed as a tyrant, but those that replace him are not described as better.

Seneca the Younger

Seneca (c. 4 BC–AD 65), Nero's teacher and advisor, writes very positively of Nero.

Suetonius

[Suetonius](#) (c. 69–130) was a member of the equestrian order, and he was the head of the department of the imperial correspondence. While in this position, Suetonius started writing biographies of the emperors, accentuating the anecdotal and sensational aspects. By this account, Nero raped the [vestal virgin](#) Rubria.

Tacitus

The *Annals* by [Tacitus](#) (c. 56–117) is the most detailed and comprehensive history on the rule of Nero, despite being incomplete after the year AD 66. Tacitus described the rule of the Julio-Claudian emperors as generally unjust. He also thought that existing writing on them was unbalanced:

The histories of Tiberius, Caius, Claudius and Nero, while they were in power, were falsified through terror, and after their death were written under the irritation of a recent hatred.

Tacitus was the son of a [procurator](#), who married into the elite family of Agricola. He entered his political life as a senator after Nero's death and, by Tacitus' own admission, owed much to Nero's rivals. Realising that this bias may be apparent to others, Tacitus protests that his writing is true.

Girolamo Cardano

In 1562, [Girolamo Cardano](#) published in Basel his *Encomium Neronis*, which was one of the first historical references of the [modern era](#) to portray Nero in a positive light.



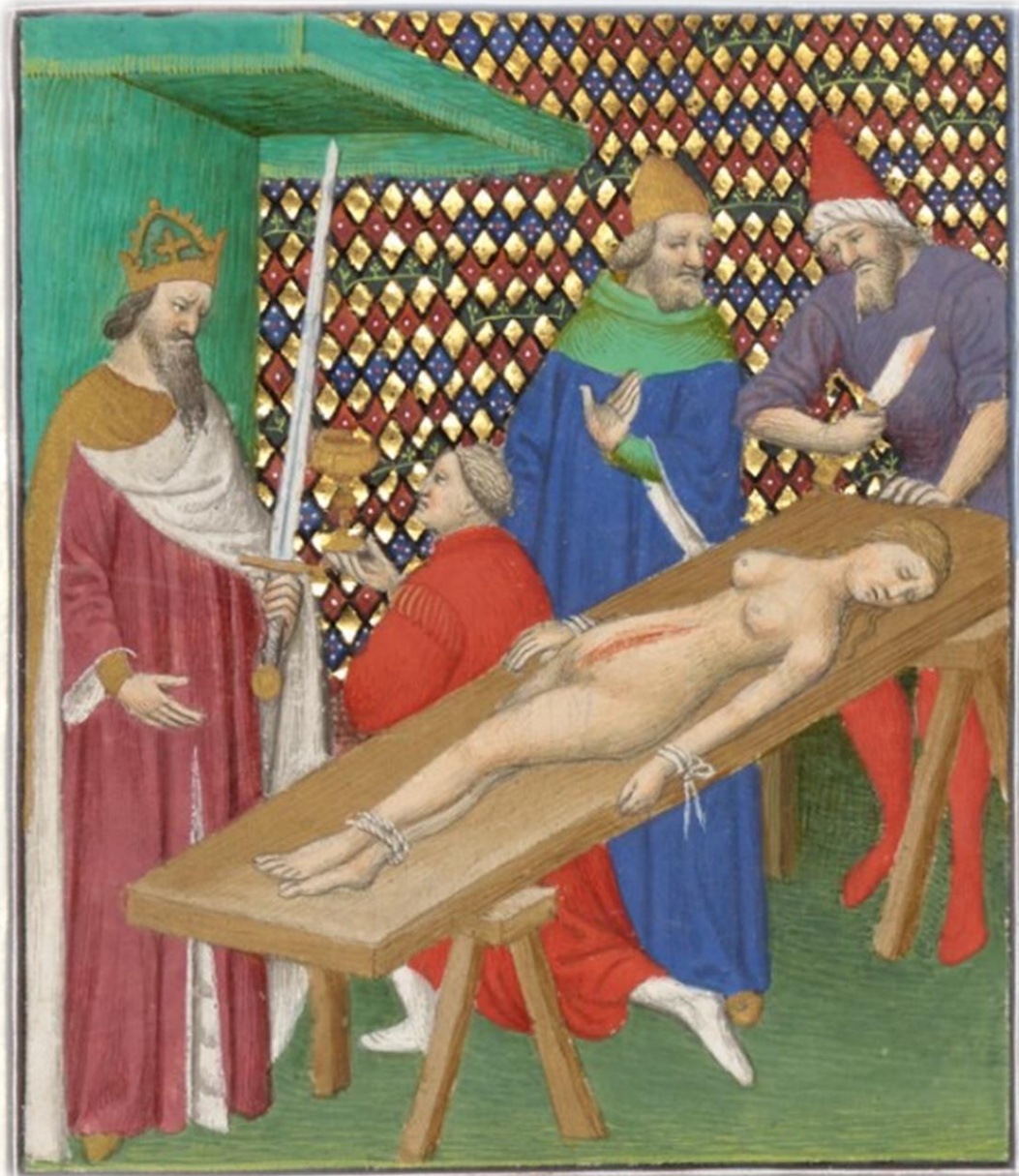
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Nero Pauses for a Drink during the Mutilation of His Mother's Body

<https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/107TYX>

Seated before the lifeless body of his mother Agrippina, the Roman Emperor Nero receives a chalice of wine from a kneeling servant. Nero had become emperor through the actions of Agrippina, who poisoned the emperor Claudius after convincing him to adopt Nero as his heir. Knowing

she had made him emperor; Nero feared her power. Following an incestuous affair with her, he stripped her of her authority. After trying unsuccessfully to kill her several times, he finally sent a boat designed to sink to transport her to a party. The boat did sink, but she swam to shore.



In desperation, Nero ordered a soldier to kill her. Without tears or any signs of sorrow, he examined, held, and caressed her dead and discolored corpse. He praised and cursed the various parts of her body. Then, while others cried, he asked for some wine. Drinking it, he looked at his mother and declared that she was beautiful.



Kindly see these Videos to know "NERO"

01] **Quo Vadis - Nero - Gladiator - Rome - Action - Drama**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yTB5kx9VmI> [1:56:59]

02] **Notorious Nero and His Amazing Architectural Legacy**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Olbooc2xAZk> [1:13:50]

03] **A balanced account of Nero's life reveals the 'editing and**

<https://aeon.co/videos/a-balanced-account-of-neros-life-reveals-the-editing-and-destruction-of-history-making> [26:32]

04] **"Nero: Legacy of a Despot" - Tutorial and Replay**

<https://aeon.co/videos/a-balanced-account-of-neros-life-reveals-the-editing-and-destruction-of-history-making> [36:38]

05] **Fact Or Fiction? The Complicated Legacy of Nero**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8debm1fhBX0> [49:13]

Roman emperor Nero was an interesting character that lived a chaotic life not too dissimilar to a soap opera. This story has been told and retold so many times in the centuries since his death, but how much of it is actually true? Tony Robinson investigates the legend to Nero to find out where the truth ends and the lies begin.

06] **Nero: The Roman Emperor - The Rise and Fall of a Tyrant**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_hJGdfBQHU [48:49]

Dive into the tumultuous life of Nero, one of Rome's most infamous emperors, in our latest video, "Nero: The Roman Emperor - The Rise and Fall of a Tyrant." Discover how this young ruler ascended to power, his extravagant lifestyle, and the political machinations that led to his infamous reputation.

07] **Nero - Intro | Video**

<https://boardgamegeek.com/video/477787/nero-legacy-of-a-despot/nero-intro> [1:37:21]

Hollywood, the Nobel Prize and Nero

- Joshua Levine wrote in Smithsonian magazine: In Mervyn LeRoy's 1951 epic *Quo Vadis*, the actor Peter Ustinov actor was nominated for an Oscar for his "deliciously hammy Nero"). "Look what I have painted!" shrieks Ustinov as he watches the Technicolor flames engulf his city. Ustinov calls for his lyre. He commences to pluck. "I am one with the god's immortal. I am Nero the artist who creates with fire," he sings tunelessly. "Burn on, O ancient Rome. Burn on!" A panicky mob converges on the palace. "They want to survive," explains Nero's levelheaded counselor Petronius (portrayed by Leo Genn, also nominated for an Oscar). "Who asked them to survive?" shrugs Nero. Great cinema it isn't, but it is terrific stuff all the same. And this is more or less the consensus Nero of history, set down first by the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius and etched deeper by the New Testament Book of Revelation and later Christian writings. [Source: Joshua Levine; Smithsonian magazine, October 2020]
- "The man most responsible for Nero's modern incarnation is the Polish novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz, whose *Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero*, appeared in 1895 and was the basis for the Mervyn LeRoy film and half a dozen other cinematic versions. The plot centers on the doomed love between a young Christian woman and a Roman patrician, but their pallid romance is not what turned the novel into a worldwide sensation. Sienkiewicz researched Roman history deeply; his Nero and other historical characters hum with authenticity. It was they, more than the book's fictional protagonists, who vaulted *Quo Vadis* to runaway best-seller status, translated into over 50 languages. **Sienkiewicz ended up winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1905.**
- "Sienkiewicz plucks two strings that resonated loudly with his audience, and have done so ever since: Nero's role as the emblematic persecutor of early Christianity (Poland is a deeply Catholic country) and Nero's political tyranny (to Sienkiewicz, an ardent nationalist, Nero's Rome stood in for czarist Russia).
- Rebecca Mead wrote in *The New Yorker*: In a more recent popular depiction, a TV movie directed by the late Paul Marcus, Nero is represented as a pretty-boy prince traumatized by having witnessed his father being murdered by the emperor Caligula; Nero starts his reign with good intentions before embarking upon his own program of Caligula-style excesses. His popular reputation even features in that comprehensive catalogue of humanity "The Simpsons," in an episode in which Homer takes his evangelical neighbor, Ned Flanders, to Las Vegas for an experiment in depravity. After a night

of boozing at the tables, they wake to find that each has married a cocktail waitress from the hotel casino where they are staying: Nero's Palace. [Source: Rebecca Mead, The New Yorker, June 7, 2021]

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Nero

From Power to Infamy

<https://medium.com/@tinywonder/the-life-and-legacy-of-emperor-nero-from-power-to-infamy-b63a03472061>

Early Life and Rise to Power

Nero was the fifth Roman Emperor, and his reign from 54 to 68 AD was one of the most controversial in Roman history. Nero was born in 37 AD in Antium, Italy, and his birth name was Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus. He became Emperor at the young age of 16 after his stepfather and predecessor, Claudius, died. Nero's reign was marked by his lavish spending, artistic endeavors, and the persecution of Christians.

Nero's Reign as Emperor of Rome

Nero was known for his extravagance and love of the arts, particularly music and theater. He performed in public himself, and his performances were often controversial, with some saying that he was more interested in showing off his skills than in the quality of his art. Nero's love of the arts led him to build theaters and other public venues throughout Rome. He was also known for his excessive spending on lavish parties and gifts for his friends.



However, Nero's reign was also marked by his ruthless persecution of Christians. In 64 AD, a fire broke out in Rome, destroying much of the city. Many Romans believed that Nero had started the fire to clear the way for his building projects, and he was widely criticized for his handling of the situation. In response, Nero blamed the Christians for the fire and launched a campaign of persecution against them. Many were arrested, tortured, and killed, and Nero became one of the most notorious persecutors of Christians in history.

Nero's reign was also marked by political unrest, including a rebellion by the governor of Hispania Tarraconensis, which Nero put down with force. He also faced opposition from the Senate, which became increasingly critical of his behavior and policies.

Legacy and Controversies Surrounding Nero's Rule

Nero's reign came to an end in 68 AD, when he was declared an enemy of the state by the Senate and forced to flee Rome. He committed suicide the following year, ending one of the most controversial reigns in Roman history.

Despite his many controversies, Nero is remembered for his artistic accomplishments, particularly his contributions to Roman theater. He was also known for his ambitious building projects and his attempts to improve the lives of ordinary Romans. However, his persecution of Christians and his excessive spending have tarnished his legacy, and he remains one of the most controversial figures in Roman history.



Last Days & Legacy

<https://www.openmindtours.com/en/blog/rome-off-the-beaten-path/critical-biography-roman-emperor-nero>

The decline and the assassination attempt against the emperor Nero

As Nero's reign progressed, his governance became increasingly erratic. Seneca and Burrus were replaced by more pliable but less competent advisors, and Nero indulged in personal excesses. His marriage to Poppaea Sabina, after divorcing and possibly executing his first wife Octavia, further eroded his political support. Poppaea herself died under mysterious circumstances, with some accounts suggesting Nero kicked her to death during a fit of rage.

Discontent with Nero's rule culminated in a series of revolts and conspiracies. The most significant was the Pisonian Conspiracy of 65 AD, a plot by senators to assassinate Nero. Although it failed, it revealed the depth of elite dissatisfaction. Nero responded with brutal repression, executing conspirators, including his former tutor Seneca.

By 68 AD, provincial governors began to rebel, most notably Galba in Spain. Faced with widespread opposition, including desertion by the Praetorian Guard and the Senate declaring him a public enemy, Nero fled Rome. He committed suicide in June 68 AD, reportedly exclaiming, "What an artist dies in me!" Catchphrase easily attributable to the imagination of Ancient Roman historians rather than an elusive historical truth.

The Artistic and Political Legacy

Nero's reign is widely condemned in historical accounts of Ancient Rome. Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio—all members of the senatorial class—present him as a tyrant consumed by vanity, cruelty, and excess. Their writings form the foundation of Nero's negative image in history.

However, modern historians have reassessed emperor Nero's legacy, pointing out that his reign was not devoid of accomplishments. His early rule saw attempts at fiscal reform, diplomacy (notably with Parthia, present-day Iran), and public works. His patronage of the arts, though controversial, was genuine, and some argue that his persecution of Christians, while brutal, must be seen within the context of Roman governance rather than as an outlier in Roman imperial behavior.

Emperor Nero's reign remains one of the most polarizing in Roman history. On one hand, he is remembered as a ruthless, self-indulgent despot who squandered the resources of the empire on personal pleasures. On the other hand, Nero's interest in the arts, architecture, and governance—albeit flawed—suggests a more nuanced ruler. His reign reflects the instability of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and the challenges

of managing a vast empire, where personal ambition and public responsibility often clashed disastrously.



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